

Testimony of

Dr. Andrea Peterson, M.D.

on

SB 991, “An Act Concerning an Advisory Council on Palliative Care”

March 15, 2013

The Administration and clinical staff of The Connecticut Hospice thank the Committee on Public Health for allowing us to testify in **support of Raised Bill 991**, “An Act Concerning an Advisory Council on Palliative Care”. We congratulate the State of Connecticut for its willingness to consider seriously the needs of patients with serious and advanced illnesses and their families. We applaud the initiative to review the current state of palliative care in Connecticut and to empower a council comprised of professionals working within this important field to make recommendations to the Department of Public Health as to how the care of patients with advanced illnesses can be improved throughout our state.

The Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care, developed as part of the National Consensus Project, defines palliative care as follows: “The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering, and to support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of their stage of disease or the need for other therapies, in accordance with their values and preferences.... Palliative care is accomplished through effective management of pain and other distressing symptoms, while incorporating psychosocial and spiritual care according to patient/ family needs, values, beliefs, and culture(s).”

The State of Connecticut has a long history of support for excellence and care of patients with advanced and serious illness. The Connecticut Hospice was the first dedicated hospice in the United States and the first obtain Joint Commission certification in Palliative Care. Five of our physicians and approximately 84 of our nurses are nationally certified in their discipline in Hospice and Palliative Care. Moreover, Connecticut has been at the forefront of supporting hospice and palliative care through appropriate licensure. Many hospitals and agencies throughout the state now offer palliative care and end-of-life services.

As the population of the state and the nation ages, and as the “Baby Boomer” generation grows older, the number of patients facing serious diagnoses such as cancer, heart failure, kidney disease, and chronic lung disease, among many others, will grow. Our medical system, as traditionally configured, is excellent at dealing with acute exacerbations of disease. However, as a patient’s disease progresses, their exacerbations often become more frequent and more severe, often necessitating more frequent visits to the Emergency Room and more frequent and prolonged hospitalizations. Palliative care seeks to help patients and their families achieve

smoother control of distressing symptoms, with an overall goal of supporting the best possible quality of life.

As the Public Health Committee well knows, healthcare is in the midst of a sea change. The process of transformation from our past and current systems to the healthcare of the future is proving to be a painful one, through with challenges and difficult changes. Those of us who practice hospice and palliative medicine understand about difficult choices. We talk with our patients and their families about these choices every day and just as palliative care has become integral to the medical treatment of patients with serious and advanced illnesses, palliative care should be an integral part of the healthcare future. Once again, we at The Connecticut Hospice, Inc. applaud the Department of Public Health for its attention to palliative care; a discipline which we firmly believe will benefit patients, families, communities, and our society in the years to come.

This testimony is submitted by Dr. Andrea Peterson, M.D., Associate Medical Director, The Connecticut Hospice, Inc., on behalf of Dr. Joseph Andrews, M.D., Chairman of the Connecticut Palliative Physicians Group and the Administration of The Connecticut Hospice, Inc. and The John D. Thompson Institute for Education, Training and Research, Inc.